

the unborn. But this isn't about abortion. This isn't a question of when life begins. This is about the fundamental rights of all Americans, as spelled out in our founding documents. And this decision by the Obama administration is a devastating blow against the freedom of religion.

It's one thing for the Federal Government to try to take over our health care system, and we can all debate the merits of such legislation. But I think we can all agree, no matter on what side of the aisle we stand, that the right to freely express our religious beliefs—and, more importantly, not have other beliefs forced upon us—is a core value of this country. It is nonnegotiable.

Good people of all faiths should be outraged by this decision. If this administration can trample on the beliefs and rights of the American Catholics, those of other religions should ask, are we next?

Yesterday, I read in The New York Times that legal scholars say the American Constitution is old and outdated, that it isn't relevant in the modern world. Now, as this administration ignores our most treasured values—not religious values, but American values—our Constitution could not be more relevant. The first words of the American Bill of Rights are: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

They're first, and they're first for a reason. The United States of America has long been a place of religious freedom. It's one of the things that separates us from foreign countries. Just as the Federal Government should not endorse a religion, it should not punish a religion, either. All religions must be treated equally. They must be respected. That's the American way. Today, Catholics all across the United States feel like outsiders. They feel as if their government has betrayed them.

Catholic leaders, including three bishops that lead Catholics in my district, have clearly said they cannot and will not comply with this unjust decision by the Obama administration. No one should have to choose between their God and their government. And no one, especially a government founded on religious freedom, should force them to.

The decision by this administration to make Catholics violate their most basic principles is a violation of the most basic American principle. I strongly condemn the Obama administration for this outrageous overreach of Federal authority; and I strongly encourage the administration to rescind this unfair, un-American policy. If the Obama administration can take away this most basic American value for 80 million Catholics, who's next?

H.R. 3548, THE NORTH AMERICAN ENERGY ACCESS ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. HARPER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. HARPER. Mr. Speaker, yesterday, in an effort to create American jobs and move energy supply from a friendly trading partner to the United States gulf coast, the House Energy and Commerce Committee favorably reported H.R. 3548 to the full House. H.R. 3548, the North American Energy Access Act, would end a waiting game that has lasted for over 3 years by pushing forward approval of the Keystone XL pipeline.

In his State of the Union speech 2 weeks ago, the President promised to significantly expand production of oil and natural gas from offshore and onshore public lands.

□ 1120

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, he never mentioned his decision to reject the Keystone XL pipeline.

While the President's comments about expanding oil and gas production in the U.S. were welcome news to many, I'm not sure how many people took his pledge seriously given his decision on Keystone XL. I am hopeful that the President will follow through on expanding production. I just wish he would have helped our country reduce our dependence on Middle Eastern oil while creating tens of thousands of jobs here in America by approving the pipeline application.

The President's excuse for not approving the pipeline application was that he didn't have enough time. Radical environmentalists say that tar sands crude is the dirtiest of all, and they talk as if that's something foreign, something new. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point your attention to a Friday, February 3, 2012 article on the front page of the National Journal, an article that I believe shows the fallacies in the arguments against the pipeline. The article states that "despite environmental opposition, the Obama administration has approved a controversial oil-sands pipeline."

The article refers to an oil-sands pipeline approved by the administration over 2 years ago. On August 20, 2009, Secretary of State Clinton approved a 1,000-mile pipeline with the capacity to carry 800,000 barrels of oil from Canada's oil sands to Wisconsin. Mr. Speaker, if a pipeline that closely mirrors that of the proposed Keystone XL was good enough for the President in August of 2009, why is the Keystone XL pipeline not good enough for him in an election year? If time and the environment were reasons to deny Keystone XL in January 2012, they should have had the same reasons to deny the Canada-Wisconsin pipeline in 2009.

Keystone XL is a shovel-ready construction project that doesn't need a stimulus bill to get it started. Estimates show that the project could create 20,000 construction jobs imme-

diately and could transport more than 1 million barrels of oil per day from Canada and the Bakken shale formation in North Dakota and Montana to gulf coast refineries.

With the ability to transport that amount of friendly oil from our largest trading partner and neighbor to the north, Canada, as well as domestic oil, and with the ability to create an additional estimated 100,000 jobs over the lifetime of the pipeline, it's no wonder why the American public supports Keystone XL. At a time when unemployment and prices at the pump are high and new predictions say gasoline could top \$4 this year, it's no wonder that the American public was disappointed in the President's decision.

In a recent installment of the United Technologies/National Journal Congressional Connection poll, Americans surveyed were asked: Supporters of the pipeline say it will ease America's dependence on Mideast oil and create jobs. Opponents fear the environmental impact of building a pipeline. What about you—do you support or oppose building the Keystone XL pipeline? Sixty-four percent of the respondents favored the construction of Keystone XL and only 22 percent were opposed.

Mr. Speaker, Keystone XL makes sense. It means jobs, energy security, and satisfaction for the American public. The President made a political decision to pander to his extreme environmentalist supporters in a campaign year instead of listening to the majority of the American public, and that was unfortunate.

I think that House Republicans are making it well known that the fight for Keystone XL is not over. Support in the House to move the pipeline forward has been bipartisan, very public, and very well received by the American people. As of yesterday, that support has produced a bill to push Keystone XL forward. I look forward to continuing my commitment to jobs, energy security, and the building of the Keystone XL pipeline.

WE ARE OUR BROTHERS' AND SISTERS' KEEPER

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE of Texas. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving us an opportunity to share some crucial human catastrophes that are occurring around the world.

I'm challenging all of my colleagues and those who would listen that sometimes we are, in fact, through peaceful means, our brothers' and sisters' keeper. First, as we have seen the ascending violence occur in Syria, a nation-state that I have visited, bloodshed that has included the loss of women and children, hearing news reports where citizens of Syria are begging for someone to do something, it is almost as if you came out of your house and stood by as your neighbor's house burned. We know

in America many would try to get a garden hose, others call 911; but they do something because of the horror of what they're seeing.

Constantly, our media airwaves are being beat with the sounds of gunshots, smoke and devastation and a steadfast refusal of Dr. Assad to step down. His first representation was that these were al Qaeda and terrorists, and we need to listen to him. There is a general respect for the sovereignty of a nation. And I'm not one pushing the immediate attack by the United States. The American people have spoken on their cautiousness—our soldiers and their treasure are precious. But just as I was with a number of our men and women this past Saturday who had been to Iraq or Afghanistan or are prepared to go elsewhere, our soldiers are always prepared to defend the needs of people who cannot help themselves.

But I call upon today the recognition that the United Nations has to fix itself. For as a consensus was coming together for the right approach—possibly U.N. troops to maintain the peace, as was done in places on the continent of Africa—who raises their selfish voices? Two countries, China and Russia, veto the consensus of many to try and help these people who are in need—children and women dying in the streets, not able to live in peace.

So I believe that those who had an idea need to go back to the Security Council. They need to make sure that we know that the U.N. is the entity that it was crafted to be in the late 1940s, the voice of reason, the ability to step in. They need to pressure these two, in essence, outlanders—those who want to stand out of the circle of care just because of selfish reasons of oil—to get out of the way or be part of the team.

I believe it is important as well, as we look at Libya and its quietness now, working quietly to try and restructure. Many people fought against that. I was delighted to be with a number of my colleagues, the first Members of the United States Congress to go stand in front of the Libyan Embassy and say Qadhafi must go. Sometimes you have to step out of the circle of comfort.

I ask Syrian Americans to stand up and be heard. Go to the United Nations; ask that your countrymen be safe. Let us hear your voices. Likewise, I ask for Egyptian Americans—we have been allies with Egypt for a long time, and I am trying to understand the tension or confusion between governments. But my point is, this is a government-to-government issue. Let my people go. Let the Americans go. You can find no basis that they have intently, with intent, done anything that deserves that they are, one, indicted and, two, cannot travel out of the Egyptian boundaries. I call upon Egyptian Americans to rise up and be heard, for our alliance is better than a few Americans.

I take great issue with Republican Presidential politics trying to claim this is the same thing as the hostages

in Iran. Let us make no political statement about this. These are Americans. We want them out; we want them out now. But the idea is that there must be some responsible leadership in Egypt to recognize that spoiling or ending the alliance between Egypt and the United States is not worth this petty action.

So I ask for Syrian Americans, Mr. Speaker, and Egyptian Americans to go to my Web site, SHEILA JACKSON LEE—you can find it. Let me know what you want to do and how you're going to support the efforts of making peace or having peace in Syria and saving our fellow Americans in Egypt. Now is the time. It is no time for languishing in fear.

□ 1130

THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ARE LOOKING FOR MORE THAN TALK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, last month we heard some productive talk from the President during his State of the Union Address. His acknowledgement that we need increased domestic production of oil and natural gas was quite promising. Or, maybe his commitment "to fight obstruction with action." Those types of words are always welcome in this Chamber. Unfortunately, the President's action, or lack thereof, continues to fall short of the rhetoric.

Mr. Speaker, there continues to be a great divide between the words in the speech the President delivers and his actual actions or leadership. Despite a pledged commitment to energy security, this administration has worked to counter attempts at making America's energy future more secure.

The President's denial of the Keystone XL pipeline, which has the potential to create thousands of jobs and add to our energy security, is just the latest example. Between the energy resources that would be provided by a constructed, completed Keystone pipeline and the domestic natural gas fields in the United States that are in production right now, we could shut off the valve of dependency on Middle East oil.

In the House, we've advanced dozens of bills to expand domestic resource production and encourage new job creation, almost all of which have been denied consideration by the Senate.

With any hope, the President will meet his commitment to fight obstruction with action by calling on the Senate to work with the House on these important initiatives. With almost 2 million more Americans out of work since taking office, the American people are looking for more than just talk.

Mr. Speaker, the American people are looking for things that they've not seen in Washington: leadership by the President and action by the Senate.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 11 o'clock and 32 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker at noon.

PRAYER

Reverend Dr. David Anderson, Faith Baptist Church, Sarasota, Florida, offered the following prayer:

Our gracious Heavenly Father, we come before You with thanksgiving and praise for Your protection of and blessings on our Nation. We thank You for Your mercy, grace, and forgiveness of our national transgressions, and we trust You to lead us into righteousness.

We ask You to enable the men and women of the House of Representatives to faithfully carry out their duties and the purposes of Your will. Empower them with wisdom, courage, and compassion. Grant them the character to withstand the temptations of power and privilege, and bring them wise counselors and friends to help them do what is right. Give them wisdom and make them true statesmen.

We ask You to bless their families and shelter them from the political fallout of unpopular decisions. Fill their homes with love, hope, and faith.

Restore our Nation's historic faith that we might pray "God bless America" with integrity. We ask these things in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER. Will the gentleman from New York (Mr. HIGGINS) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. HIGGINS led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

WELCOMING REVEREND DR. DAVID ANDERSON

The SPEAKER. Without objection, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BUCHANAN) is recognized for 1 minute.